

On Governmental Reason in Educational and Research Institutions

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Introduction: Administrative Drift

The drift of the present time seems to follow a very precise route. The currents drag not due to casual trajectories but according to detailed nautical charts and pre-established directions. Just as with the play of wind, which everything seems to abandon itself to, according to a line of intentions that are in no way improvised nor ephemeral. It is useless to say that the same general drift, which nothing seems to escape, carries in its wake also the boat of learning which we are usually concerned with, marking it with its own sense and consistency. It would be erroneous, however, to isolate a “present time”, the here and now of things that daily take us into its fold, from its historical course, from its so-called “spirit”, from the long-term lines that have made it what it is. We will therefore take into account, speaking of today, of its intrinsic historicity, of the temporal coordinates that substantiate its emergence, without however expecting to enter broadly into this, which is a task beyond the more circumscribed latitude and more focused thematic of this paper.

A further look, for contrasts and not coincident, in dealing with the spirit of the time we are attempting to develop, will have as a basis (and provisional first floors) a constant exercise of “re-nomination”, both in the sense of Horkheimer in “The Eclipse of Reason”, and consistent in the knowledgeable effort of calling things by their correct names, leading back to the general rationality that informs them – an effort of truth that allows us “to withstand if not to overcome the demoralizing and mutilat-

ing effects of formalized reason”¹, attempting to get language to correspond to reality; and in the sense of Barthes in his *Mythologies* regarding the phenomena of “e-nomination” of the “dominant ideology” inasmuch as it is “anonymous ideology”.² Let us do our work, as methodology, as recommended by Adorno as the opening of his “Theory of Half-Education” (*Theory der Halbbildung*), referring to the necessity, if one is interested in understanding “the crisis of the Bildung”, we might even say its drift, namely to enlarge one’s viewpoint from the “lack of an educational system and of educational methods” and from individual pedagogical reforms advanced from “extrapedagogical realities”, constituting a “horizon of connections”, a constellation of determinate factors, that it would be first necessary to explain. To be disinterested would be ingenuous.³ The “power” that we intend to investigate here in some of its constitutive connotations is that of “neoliberal rationality”, whose fundamental connotation is that of being a “governmental” rationality, according to the formulation adopted again recently by Dardot and Laval, based on some seminal writings by Foucault, in particular those related to his courses taught at the Collège de France in 1977-78 and in 1978-79.⁴

The “Extra-pedagogical power” which we will discuss is therefore the “governmental power” that, through the administration of the State, particular techniques and procedures, guides the conduct of people, both in learning institutions, and through them. An important detail is the following:

The government, far from trusting only to discipline for reaching the more intimate meanderings of the individual, seeks...to obtain a self-

¹ Cf. M. Horkheimer, *The Eclipse of Reason*, London and New York, Continuum, 1974, p. 122.

² Cf. R. Barthes, *Mythologies*, New York, Noonday Press, 1991, p. 139.

³ See T.W. Adorno, *Theorie der Halbbildung* (1959), It. tr.: *Teoria della Halbbildung*, Genova, il melangolo, 2010, pp. 7-8.

⁴ Cf. P. Dardot C. Laval, *La nouvelle raison du monde. Essai sur la société néolibérale* (2009), trad. it. *La nuova ragione del mondo. Critica della razionalità neoliberista*, Roma, DeriveApprodi, 2013; M. Foucault, *Sicurezza, territorio, popolazione. Corso al Collège de France 1977-1978*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 2004 e Id., *Nascita della biopolitica. Corso al Collège de France 1978-1979*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 2005.

governance of the individual, that is, to produce a determined type of relationship with themselves.⁵

Governing for half of freedom, that is playing actively on the space of freedom left to the individuals so that they conform autonomously to a determinate norm.⁶

Among the techniques responsible for guiding the conduct of people, in a secondary position, is so-called “evaluation,” which we understand as a true form of governance “a new way to give orders” as was written without half-terms⁷, a “dispositive of voluntary servitude”⁸, a “regime of truth”⁹. In more general terms, we will try to bring to light and sketch the lineaments of action of governmental power, as an implicit and negative pedagogy and “factory of the neoliberal subject”. In more circumscribed terms, we will analyze the action of this same power, through the lever of evaluation in governing the conduct of professors and of lecturers and of their education. The philosophy of education can find, along these lines of inquiry, its field of analysis in the area of “governmentality studies”¹⁰, an area of research that concentrates on systems of practice and on consciousnesses that are part of them, in order to examine which non-neutral forms of rationality are at work in them. We therefore see the present study as a “critique of governmental rationality in the institutional systems of learning and research.”

⁵ Cf. P. Dardot, C. Laval, *Op. cit.*, p. 10.

⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁷ Cf. R. Gori, *Une nouvelle manière de donner des ordres?*, in AA.VV, *La folie évaluation. Les nouvelles fabriques de la servitude*, Paris, Mille et une nuits, 2011

⁸ Cf. R. Gori M.-J. Del Volgo, *L'idéologie de l'évaluation: un nouveau dispositif de servitude volontaire?*, in «Nouvelle revue de psychosociologie», 8, 2009, pp. 11-26.

⁹ Cf. V. Pinto, *Valutare e punire. Una critica della cultura della valutazione*, Napoli, Cronopio, 2012, p. 18.

¹⁰ “Governmentality Studies” is an expression that, starting in the 1980s has indicated a field of studies centered on the Foucauldian notion of governmentality.

Governmental Reason as Pedagogy

As a rationality, neoliberalism tends to give form and substance not only to the action of those governing but also to the conduct of individuals among the governed. The term “governance” which we are discussing here, and from which comes the notion of “governmentality”, is not to be understood in the strict “institutional” sense, of “governance of the institutions”, but regards “the activity that consists in governing people’s conduct within the framework of, and using the instruments of, a state”¹¹. The term “governmentality” means the multiple forms of this activity of governance of the living with the aim of conducting or managing their conduct, so that they can govern themselves giving form to a particular type of relationship with themselves. Those that “govern” in this sense, it goes without saying, may or may not be part of an institutionalized government. The “governed” are the entire population, living under a disciplinary regime and a normative logic “that is incarnated inside the institutions and devices of power whose reach is today planetary.”¹²

The principal characteristic of neoliberal rationality plays on two important axes: the “generalization of competition as a norm of behavior” and “the firm as the model of subjectivity”.¹³ The logic of the market overflows its natural boundaries, producing a new model of subjectivity that Dardot and Laval call “financial and accounting subjectivity”. In other words, it is a question of producing within individual subjectivity a relationship with oneself analogous to one’s relationship with capital.¹⁴ This rationality, developing itself fully in the decade 1980-1990, signals a difference with the original liberalism, which was based on establishing limits to political government. We no longer even ask what such limits should be, if it be the market itself, if they be rights, if they be calculations of utility. Now rather we ask “how can we make the market the principle of governance of people and of governance of itself?”. The logic of the market, as

¹¹ Cf. M. Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College De France 1978-9*, New York, Palgrave MacMillan 1988, p. 318.

¹² Cf. P. Dardot, C. Laval, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

¹³ *Ivi*, pp. 8-9.

¹⁴ *Ivi*, p. 22.

a normative logic, unfolds itself thus from the State to the most intimate details of subjectivity.¹⁵ If therefore at stake is the “fabrication” of subjectivity conforming to a way of conceiving economic production, therefore according to the fundamentals of neoliberal anthropology, that rationality works on the active side also as an implicit pedagogy.

The transformation of educational systems ends up being difficult to comprehend since they are isolated within the sphere of rationality that informs them, and within the forms assumed by the latter over the past thirty years. In this respect, we are obliged to develop a critical analysis and a critical theory “from outside”. The school and the university are certainly the spaces where the normative neoliberal logic has overflowed into in a direction of progressively making functional that to this. The learning institutions are transformed in the sense of adapting themselves, not due to blindly or unknowingly drifting, but according to a general rationality that presents itself as a set of announcements, of evidences, of necessary devices on the road of progressive, if not already definitive naturalization. Those institutions, and the institutions more generally, modify themselves through the concrete practice of fulfilling the “new” norms of those operating within them.

Economics furnishes the model of that which consciousness must be: “an income-generating information, an accumulate-able capital, a continuous discipleship of innovation and obsolescence.”¹⁶ Consciousness, which is more than merely information and, more than the indifferent flow of opinions, as is always good to remember, no longer has any value in itself; is acquires value on the condition that it can sustain or be the means of creating profit. As Laval et. al. well formulate it,

...the finality, the organization, the functioning of the teaching and research institutions are by now ever more subordinate to a market logic that, institutionally, imposes on the consciousness the abstract form of an economic value starting from which we will be forced to think, to judge, to value.¹⁷

¹⁵ *Ivi*, p. 26.

¹⁶ Cf. P. Clement, G. Dreux, F. Vergne, Ch. Laval, *La nouvelle école capitaliste*, Paris, La Découverte, p. 12.

¹⁷ *Ivi*, p. 13.

The adverb “institutionally” plays a central role in the passage just cited. The State is not a neutral party in the spread of the norms of “new public management” and is an active and voluntary agent in the production and” implementation” of the norms of competitiveness. Market logic cognitively re-orient, and brings to thinking, judging, valuing, evaluating, and, we might add, to teaching and researching the general finality of economic valorization. “Economic value is the ultimate criterion for the institutional and social validation of the activity of teaching and research.”¹⁸ The professor-subject that takes form through this implicit pedagogy gradually learns how to act as if every single teaching, every single research cannot be conceived outside of its economic value. Consciousness as a form of commodity, scholastic institutions as forms of commodities, universities as forms of commodity.

Setting fire still further to the incorporation of these world of life and professions into the neoliberal rationality, through the conducting of our conduct and the active participation of implicated subjects, we can see from a new angle the “logic of competence”, which is predominant in teaching, and the “logic of innovation” in the field of research. The first logic leads to so-called “professionalization” of courses of study, induces the restructuring of content and of evaluation devices. Every single teaching becomes conceivable, rationalized, and has a right to exist in light of that category, which we do not consider, we repeat, as isolated but which we have returned to the rationality that has fed it. The second logic, that of innovation, is the daughter of the same rationality, for which consciousness has value, therefore conceivable, and make sense and have a right to exist, if and only if in the final analysis they are oriented towards improving the effectiveness of competitiveness and the competition between firms. The two logics, together

Work a reduction to abstraction of human learning and of intellectual activity to only economic value: exchange value on the labor market, for scholastic and university learning, exchange value on the market for patents and other intellectual property titles for research activity¹⁹.

¹⁸ *Ivi*, p. 14.

¹⁹ *Ivi*, p. 16.

It is clear that those who will suffer the greatest in this process will be the humanistic disciplines, which are the most difficult to synchronize with the “spirit of the time” and with its rules of the game. At least without reinventing themselves from top to bottom, up to and including voluntary progressive amputations.

Evaluation as a technique for governance and instructing conduct

The neoliberal subject must accept the need to show performance results, his or her efficiency and capacity to produce must be held accountable, measurable. Whether she is the employee of a private firm that produces soaps and detergents, or a teacher or research scientist, the normative logic is the same. The “product” does not change, we could say, even if we reverse the order of the factors dictated by the general logic of the discourse. Among the governmental techniques responsible for conducting our conduct and the progressive internalization of these, evaluation figures highly. A new “truth regime” which little by little has become acceptable, almost a regular computerized routine. The need to verify the use of public moneys to avoid waste is one thing, however, limiting this to recording or photographing the objective reality that is of concern. It is quite another thing to create a governmental device that directs, modifies, and determines the “limited reality” that time after time evaluates²⁰; still another to bring to life a form of governance that manages and transforms reality and that aims “at exercising a constant pressure so that one acts “autonomously”... in a way that is ever more efficient and responsive to requests.”²¹ Without anyone, apparently, explicitly giving any orders. This form of governance, in fact, aims at self-governing by means of freedom, as discussed in the preceding account. The governance of conduct cannot in a neoliberal regime, not even one in the course of de-democratization (emptying democracy of its content while leaving its form intact), assume the modalities of traditional authoritarian control. It must be able to act through the progressive con-

²⁰ See V. Pinto, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

²¹ *Ivi*, pp. 37-38.

sent of the individuals, through the voluntary, convinced and naturalized incorporation of the required conduct. The individual that must be trained is one that learns to anticipate by him or herself what is expected of them, without this coming through coercion. It is one thing to hold oneself accountable to society for one's own work, and quite another to train in the person working a new form of mentis with an ethos annexed and connected without telling them so, universalizing a managerial technique and transforming to its roots the social role of consciousness and of the intellectual professions. The "benchmarking" that assumes as a given the principle of competition as the best possible organizational principle, would have, as already stated, a "positive political and pedagogical value", being a "strategic reference that specifies in transparent and measurable terms the goals to be achieved."²² A pedagogical value, as we have clearly seen, with words that appear in retrospect to have just slipped out and instead disclose exactly what we are talking about here. Intellectual labor, with its "ascetic virtues" and with its own and specific unproductive and unpredictable temporalities, is drastically redesigned from the ground up in the name of the virtues of service, which synchronize it with the sole temporality recognized as appropriate and valid, that is that of the market and of the rationality of the firm. The subject is conducted to make themselves into a "firm of oneself", "entrepreneur of oneself" subject to "continuous improvement" because continually exposed to "risks".

What then, are some of the governmental instruments? Today, writes Pinto, "the countersign of power is that ability to have at one's disposal batteries of indices and indicators, systems of calculation, and tools for standardized disclosure, entrusted to expert technicians."²³ Indices that present as self-evident, incontestable, objective, neutral, able to finally measure the much-awaited merit and the value of someone. What we are interested in emphasizing is the trigger, by means of assessment, of a process of training and unaware self-training, the apprenticeship of a conduct through the mere fulfilling of requirements in succession. Such conduct

²² Cf. G. Allulli, *Dalla strategia di Lisbona a Europa 2020*, "Newsletter CNOS-SCUOLA 2012", in V. Pinto, *Op. cit.*, p. 99.

²³ Pinto, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

retroacts in a conformist manner on individual professional intentions so as to reproduce the required behavior as a necessary education, and presupposing as guiding values the indicators of performance.

The “evaluation question” has been the subject of opposed positions taken, for example, in nearby France. The “*Appel des Appel. Pour une insurrection des consciences*” of 22 December 2008 is an important example. Edited by Roland Gori and Stefan Chedri, it gets straight to the point:

We, health professionals, of social labor, of education, of justice, of information and of culture, call for the attention of those in power and of public opinion on the disastrous social consequences of the Reforms hurriedly put forward in the past few years... In the name of the ideology of “economic man”, power is dismantling and recomposing our professions and our missions increasingly exposing professionals and users to the “natural” laws of the market...²⁴

All the domains of thought are affected, none must escape. The governmental will to evaluate is, in fact, a hegemonic will. All are invited to pass through the same processes. The truth of what has value however does not being from subjects but from criteria that are external to them. The certificate of existence of an object (laws on unique areas of study, unique teaching, research, action, didactic, educational action...) is determined by the degree to which it adjusts itself to criteria, parameters, indicators that are extraneous to it. Evaluation, as Abelhauser notes,

Is expensive, very expensive... not only because it is particularly time-consuming... but above all because it operates as a gigantic machine that diverts one from their function, that dissuades one from exercising their own profession... forcing them to not undertake actions that are not susceptible to evaluation according to the approved metrics²⁵.

²⁴ Cf. R. Gori, B. Cassin, Ch. Laval, *L'Appel des Appels. Pour une insurrection des consciences*, Paris, Mille et une Nuits, 2009.

²⁵ Cf. A. Abelhauser, *Proloque*, in *Le folie évaluation*, cit., p. 9. Regarding “time consumption” the first effect, not the only one of course, due to the introduction of procedures of evaluation is the lowering of the estimated productivity by 20%. On this see J.C. Maleval, *L'évaluation pernicieuse*, in *La folie évaluation*, cit., p. 18.

A new way to give orders, a device for voluntary servitude, a truth regime, we wrote in the introduction using the strong language of Gori, Dal Volgo and Pinto. A tool, a means, one that justifies itself, in which ends are other than those declared, as has been deduced by several scholars. The essential thing is not the production of figures, though these play an important role, so much as to achieve a “logic of symbolic domination”²⁶ that reconfigures in a particular way the professions of public space,

Remodeled in the name of realism, of pragmatism, of utility and performance: the professionals are invited to update themselves according to the values and the Habitus of the private sector, a sector exposed to the war of the globalized market... integrating the cultural values of financial capitalism²⁷.

Certainly, nothing is better than figures to administer and govern the human being. But what counts more in the final analysis is the apprenticeship of evaluation as “self-governing” by the subject that practices a given profession. Even here an implicit pedagogy operates in a negative sign. For it is oriented more to the numerical normalization of conduct than to so-called “quality improvement” of didactics and of research, in a such a way as to “insure” the anxious society that the public’s money has been well spent.

Of what “quality” do those who speak of quality according to governmental devices of evaluation speak? Do they truly refer to the “quality” of the thing? To the essential properties that render a thing really that which it is and not something else? The “quality” at stake regards in reality a judgment, dependent on an external recognition of value, and which coincides with the forms of judgment about quality. It is really this notion of “quality” understood

as judgment... based on the norms that must guide such judgments (formalized to the highest degree as “normative”) that which resides in the principle of quality control, which is posited as a guide for all practice of evaluation,

²⁶ Cf. R. Gori, *Une nouvelle manière de donner des ordres?*, cit., p. 43.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

so emphasizes Pinto.²⁸ Judgment, and here we get to the point, does not follow “the thing” but rather anticipates it “quality migrates from the thing to the processes of production of the thing, or to their control”.²⁹ It is for this reason that activities are formalized and normalized according to their approved standard. In the name of transparency, of equality, in the name of managerial rationality and “technique”, of a formal “objectivity” that presents itself as incontestable, although its methodological unreliability has already been clearly documented. The desired result, in fact, determines the methodology employed³⁰ and it is perhaps useless to repeat that other “evaluations” would produce different results, since ever discourse on method is controversial, open and plural.

To put evaluation and the culture around it into question, to seek to re-examine it from a perspective that is not in harmony with a self-validating rhetoric that imposes a consensus that has been strengthened by the logic of inevitability, opens the door to themes of great import that can challenge a multitude of problematic dimensions. The scope of these pages is to present nothing more than an introduction to these, sending the reader seeking a systematic and point-by-point in-depth study to the already ample literature on the material in question. What we will now analyze is the anthropological side of evaluation, in particular, how which neoliberal governmentality, through the device of evaluation, “fabricates” the professor and the lecturer “of quality”. We will not hesitate to use some outdated considerations of possible insurgent actions that might help glimpse a reality beyond the administrative drift. To be able to jump over an obstacle one needs first to step well back to get a running start with the anachronisms of a critical theory.

On the ‘factory’ of neoliberal professors and lecturers

Two questions that try to grasp the same point from right side up and from upside down: How to synchronize didactics and research to neoliber-

²⁸ Cf. V. Pinto, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

²⁹ *Ivi*, pp. 123-4.

³⁰ Cf. J.C. Maleval, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-22.

eral rationality? And who is the desired professor or researcher, properly apprenticed and trained as we prefer to say, perhaps already achieved – echoing Nietzsche? And a painful corollary: what role has pedagogical discourse played in this process? Let's proceed in turn. And let's start with the university professor, using her as a case study. Let's start from ourselves, in other words, beginning by noting, in light of the preceding considerations, that which might at first sight appear marginal, or in any case not worthy of a close examination. We are all "evaluated" by the students that enroll in our classes. In truth even by those that don't come to class and this is not a *boutade*, instead it seems to remain reasonably serious. The questionnaire that the students are invited to fill out after having taken the final exam (not at the end of the last class lecture) is taken seriously and warrants a careful observation in a counter-light. The questions asked, countersign of power we have argued, certainly vary from campus to campus. We are interested in the substance, in certain key elements that can enable us to see how this governmental device operates. We will examine as well a rather curious questionnaire that all university of * professors have received, with an attached plea to complete it, sent by an institutionally accredited "research group", interested in "supporting" the faculty. Our assumption, in both cases, is that a questionnaire, far from being an innocent tool, is on the contrary a table of injunctions, or an invitation to take upon oneself its content. If of the students, through an anonymous and third party voice that presents itself as neutral and operating in the exclusive interest of improving didactics it asks, for example, if the teaching provides competence that is useful for the world of work, what does this question mean and how will it act upon the conduct of the professor? On this issue (and also on other naturally) the professor is 'evaluated'; tables are produced, percentages also, instrument panel performance summaries, where the high score is represented by high velocity, with immediate visual effect. The indirect suggestion to the professor is to reorganize his or her teaching so as to provide the competence required, independently of the discipline taught, classical philology or managerial engineering that it might be. Teaching counts for more than to merely train competence that is useful for the labor market. The professor learns over time to revise the content of his or her teaching and to conduct his or her own conduct of teaching in such a way as to favor those aspects (or to invent them from scratch) that can be translated into concrete operations. The validity of a

value is thereby produced by institutional means without explicitly giving orders. It is therefore this operation, through the use of questionnaires, that is the method by which the value producing validity is institutionalized. The student (the “user” or “customer”), in turn, invited to compile the questionnaire, is made complicit by a governmental action that, in the final analysis, rather than be in her interest as it should be, will only cause injury to her. That which is expected of every single class session, the providing of useable competence in the world of work, by do it yourself, is impossible. Maybe, with a great deal of reservation, we could say it of the entire course of one’s studies. It is misleading in any case, to think of putting on the shoulders of the professors of an educational university curriculum the onus of resolving the catastrophe of mass youth unemployment and making the students believe as much, a scourge that certainly is not the fault of any supposed lack of “professionalization” of educational concentrations. The innocent question about “employment effects” for a class leads, without this having been the subject of any public discussion, to a certain concentration of teaching in a certain way of understanding the sense and the whole point of teaching that presents itself as inevitable, natural, even obvious. To think of synchronizing the temporality specific to education with the temporality of the labor market is entirely detrimental to the former, which is inevitably slower, as is, we might note, that of democracy itself. However much one can accelerate, take care of business, expel that which is useless and not “usable” on the labor market, take on in its entirety the “rhetoric” of performance, contract and unpack in modules that are ready for use the understandings and the educational tracks, this approach will always be slower than high-velocity financial capitalism, and its requirements for rapidly obsolescent human capital to be trained for the whole of one’s life course.

It is worth stressing the modality through which the consensus of a determined political conception of the society and of education is produced, and how this can travel undisturbed and spread itself through even the banality of a simple questionnaire to fill out.

If a professor, in order to proceed with the help of examples drawn from the reality of things often vaguely perceived and fulfilled, is asked to indicate on a scale of ascending values, how much teaching in the English language has changed his didactic practice, the first impression is to find before oneself a pearl, a fragment of stupidity that has escaped from

some poorly fingered keyboard. Or, if the same professor is invited to participate in a program of “preparation for professorial professionalism and teaching innovation”, is asked to express him or herself as an “organizer” or “facilitator of the apprentices”, about having decided to assign external contributions (stakeholders) during the lecture, or still yet again whether he or she has utilized the online platform not only to insert materials and make them available to the students, but also utilizing their more advanced features (for example participating in online forums etc.), what do we find ourselves dealing with exactly? It is not difficult to say at this point: we are dealing with the incarnation of a device and with the implicit negative sign pedagogy geared toward the training of the professor-subject deemed to be “of quality”. Condemned to innovation, independently of which cross bar in the ascending scale of the innocent questionnaire, he or she agrees to the disciplining of his or her conduct without prior warning, and so, will begin, inadvertently, day after day, to conform to the conduct expected by the model induced by his or her own didactic behavior. He or she will begin to believe that yes, ultimately, the English language is in itself innovative and the vehicle of positive change and an indispensable factor of internationalization as has been rather provincially stated, and will declare him or herself available to teach in the language of Wall Street or of Walmart (certainly not that of Joseph Dunne for example) even if the students should turn out to be Francophone or from the Iberian peninsula. He or she will begin to take seriously into consideration, in order not to seem old-fashioned, out of step with the time and reality, the intensive employment of digital resources in order to augment the reality of his or her educational performance, in order to improve and innovate his or her teaching method that is still too 0.0, believing in these resources being in and of themselves valid and productive independently of what is being done with them. And so on. No one has given any order to anyone. The governmental mechanism is this and we hope to have rendered it visible. Even its weak point, namely, its need for voluntary consensus, for spontaneous adhesion to successive fulfillment, deferred in time at regular cadences, as integral parts of a process of a rational and objective system which seems impossible or futile to resist. Who could ever stand to feel oneself accused of being resistant to innovation or to be singled out as refractory in the face of continuous improvement? Like a Luddite from the 11th Century, like a retrograde addicted to antiquarian pedagogy? Like an old democrat?

As far as research is concerned, things move along the same track. Just as it is necessary to give form to the neoliberal professor, it is also necessary to bring about the ideal researcher according to the “administrative drift” that is underway. In this case as well, evaluation plays a decisive role capturing, guiding, determining, modeling, controlling, the conduct and the discourses of researchers or those who intend to put at the center of their work the obsolete concept of freedom of research. A romantic residual, a useless and non-operationalize-able redundancy the champions of innovation could call it. Disciplining works here too by other means, one among many being the methodology of research. In this case as well we will proceed by looking closely and theoretical distancing, and without expecting to deal exhaustively and in detail with the question at hand.

Indicators of quality that postulate research that can find something. Criteria of evaluation of project that postulate research that can find something. But is this still research? The researcher of the new century is above all a manager:

Manage, oversee, compile reports. The system in which (the researcher) evolves tends to make him resemble the manager of a minimarket more than the disheveled thinker lost in thought...the administration that manages him is interested less – not to say not at all – in what he discovers but instead in the correct execution, line by line, of the budget³¹.

It can nevertheless become useful for the new researcher before dealing with the discourse on method or before making his epistemological position explicit (it would be going too far to write “in his” !) to take a brief course on management and accounting. The “technical-administrative drift” to which research is now subordinated touches on an apex that symptomatic and revelatory: it is necessary, solely, to declare ahead of time what the research will find, defining with rigor the final results. Is this possible? If this criteria is laughed at by Sègalat – “Mister Einstein, could you send us a theory of relativity in the next three years? Mister Fleming, discover antibiotics before the grant is finished, otherwise it

³¹ Cf. L. Sègalat, *La science à bout del souffle?* (2009), trad. it. *La scienza malata? Come la burocrazia soffoca la ricerca*, Milano, Raffaello Cortina, 2010, pp. 29-31.

will be necessary to reimburse us”³² – who is a geneticist, how can such a request be dealt with by, say, a Medieval historian? It is clear that not everyone is Le Goff but this is not the point. What, again, is the tacit operation at work? For the researcher to carry out his or her research, they need funding. In order to obtain funding they must satisfy certain criteria that are extraneous to the subject of their research, withdrawn from their judgment and from public discussion. Yet, they have no choice but to construct their research project in light of these criteria packaging it in the pre-establish format, thereby conducting their own conduct in a coherent way. If in addition they must also declare in advance what they will find, the main result is that they will not discover anything new and will limit themselves to inventing or re-inventing what is already known. To re-define it, re-interpret it as much as you like, without however even minimally going beyond it to into the unknown of discovery. The value of an idea, writes Adorno in *Minima Moralia*, “is measured by its distance from the continuity of the familiar. It is objectively devalued as this distance is reduced; the more it approximates to the preexisting standard, the further its antithetical function is diminished”.³³ If the researcher does not intend to distance himself - but cannot distance himself! – from the pre-approved standard and from the results of his research, already rigorously described before getting to work on it, he will produce and accumulate data and presumed “facts”, empirical evidence of a finite number already predictable in preliminary phases of the work itself, simple contingent descriptions that do not allow for any discovery, no real advance in knowledge. If you want to do research on the ocean, and having to begin your investigation with the facts and not by imprisoning yourself within your theoretical imagination, ironically comments Lakatos in one of his lectures,

Then you should ask for a grant – i.e. you ask the Navy to supply you with a submarine and you measure the ocean’s depth at each inch. This provides you with a submarine and with a quiet and pleasant occupation

³² *Ivi*, p. 32.

³³ T.W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia. Reflections on a Damaged Life*, London and New York, Verso, 2005, p. 50.

for a lifetime. The interesting thing is that if you ask for such a grant from the Royal Society I bet that you will get it³⁴.

The final result will be something useful, saleable, the map of the oceans, something predictable and readily deliverable.

The question is extremely serious and involves together various facets in a single warp. At stake is the evolution of the way we conceive of research. Once the researchers are put into competition with each other, the race to have projects accepted can begin. Publications, which have become the goal, have a very precise function: the researcher is ever more the manager of a form of capital that is taken advantage of by transforming published articles into funding and these in turn into published articles. And to learn to leave be any ambitions for riskier research, which might lead to following new paths that don't correspond to the required formats, which could probably begin to bear fruit, neither calculable nor describable with rigor and predictability, in time frames that are too long for the standards of scientific productivity. The problem is that continuing to describe, and perfect, and innovate the candle we will never arrive at the light bulb, which requires the discovery of a theory, that accomplished by Maxwell and of electromagnetism. For some things require time, the most precious resource for research that seeks to discover something. That which we again seek to reveal is that, for intervening criteria, an implicit pedagogy has to act undisturbed, one which governs the conduct of the governed, the researchers, such that they spontaneously act according to the behavior demanded, training in themselves – and by themselves – the *habitus* of the desired researcher. But who is the 'good researcher' or the researcher 'of quality'? Who decides and how? We are sure that it is he or she who learns and internalizes the criteria of evaluation, the indicators of quality making these become the normative ideas of true research, who is a good manager of themselves, shrewd compiler of project by the batch full, a competitive and frenetic racehorse in publications in journals that are well known to be first class? Possibly in

³⁴ Imre Lakatos, *Inductivism and Its Historical Myths*, in I. Lakatos, P. Feyerabend, *For and Against Method: Including Lakatos' Lectures on Scientific Method and the Lakatos-Feyerabend Correspondence*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1993, p. 42.

English? Perfectly synchronized with the times and the quantification of “ratings agencies” or of “accrediting agencies”? Is this how we plan to do train young people to do research? Why would Guy the researcher ever commit himself to write a ponderous essay that takes years of effort when he can ‘weigh’ more in the comparative evaluations seeking access to a pair of international (read Anglophone) journals adjusting himself to their research method criteria?

It is worthwhile now to take a look at research methodology, starting with a precise question: what is the complex of approaches and investigatory methods, in the social sciences and humanities, that best incorporates and maintains the neoliberal normative? We can try to answer this by recalling the antitheses formulated by Adorno-Horkheimer between “theoretical imagination” and “blindly pragmatized thought”, positioning the “standard view” of the research on the latter pole, certainly not on the former. The subject of advanced industrial society largely tends to think in operations more than in concepts (the concept is nothing more than its operations), is afraid of distancing herself from the facts or in any case feels uncomfortable in having to distance herself, and certainly analyzing the facts negatively does not seem “natural” to her; the transcendent elements of reason are not familiar to her, she is oriented toward identifying the efficient procedure and not so much to unproductively seek “that satisfaction that men call truth”.³⁵ How much weight does this cognitive orientation have, which imposes operationalism in physics, and behaviorism in the social sciences, and whose common approach is a radical empiricism in how it deals with concepts?³⁶ How much do these mental habits count in the configuration of a specific methodological framework that perfectly conforms to neoliberal rationality? Already Bacon, which words that sound menacing, had a way of writing in his Great Instauration that,

we do not need to give men’s understanding wings, but rather lead and weights, to check every leap and flight. And this has not been done be-

³⁵ Cf. M. Horkheimer T.W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente* (1947), trad. it., *Dialettica dell’illuminismo. Frammenti filosofici*, Torino, Einaudi, 2010, p. 13.

³⁶ Cf. H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man. Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (1964), New York, Routledge, 2007, p. 16.

fore; but when it shall be done, we may have better hope of the sciences³⁷.

And again in the preface to the second part of “The New Organon”, he wrote,

there remains one hope of salvation, one way to good health: that the entire work of the mind be started over again; and from the very start the mind should not be left to itself, but be constantly controlled; and the business done (if I may put it this way) by machines³⁸.

In sum, to the “philosopher and prophet of the technical” it is important that the human being intended to establish progressive stages of certainty be well-grounded in the world and that she lets herself be conducted by a method, almost without reflecting on it, as to how to put into motion a “mechanism.” Some see a Baconian ascendancy in part of ‘educational research’ today, where the emphasis falls on procedure, its protocols, its ‘methods’ and ‘tools’ in a strict sense, and on their functioning, rather than on questions regarding how one conceptualizes and theorizes, without taking thereby into account intellectual sophistication, the quality of judgment and comprehension.³⁹ Research has to be empirical in the strict sense, as is argued for example from the very first principle guiding the influential American document “Scientific Research in Education” – namely, “Pose Significant Questions That Can Be Investigated Empirically”.⁴⁰ If the question is not empirically investigatable that it is not significant. What do these iterations mean, these “sales pitches” masquerading as constituting seriousness? Because the totalitarian imposition of “factual proofs,” of propositions based on evidence, of the obsessively repeated “mantra” that “what counts is what works”?⁴¹ What do these de-politicized words say,

³⁷ Cf. F. Bacon, *The New Organon*, Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 83.

³⁸ *Ivi*, p. 28.

³⁹ Cf. R. Smith, *As if by Machinery. The Levelling of Educational Research*, in “Journal of Philosophy of Education”, n. 2, 2006, pp. 157-168.

⁴⁰ Cf. R. Shavelson, L. Towne (eds), *Scientific Research in Education*, Washington, National Academic Press, 2002, p. 3.

⁴¹ Cf. A. Oancea R. Pring, *The Importance of Being Thorough: On Systematic Accumulation*

what does this language say that seeks us out and that, like myth, is imperfectable, indisputable, urges us to “receive its expansive ambiguity”? That with its clarity finds things, but does not explain anything? The neoliberal narrative device produces and reproduces in subjects, of whatever form, the attitude of a certain, particular type of research that becomes *the* type of research. Thought, noted Adorno in not yet Foucauldian times,

submits to the social checks on its performance not merely where they are professionally imposed, but adapts to them its whole complexion. Because thought has by now been perverted into the solving of assigned problems, even what is not assigned is processed like a problem. Thought, having lost autonomy, no longer trusts itself to comprehend reality, in freedom, for its own sake. This it leaves, respectfully deluded, to the highest-paid, thereby making itself measurable. It behaves, even in its own eyes, as if it had constantly to demonstrate its fitness⁴².

An inventory of the known and test of intelligence, “little homeworks” the Celine of Professor Y would call them. It is the research methodology, with its leads and its weights, that provides for surveillance of the researcher once he or she is assumed to “govern oneself” and for thought that controls itself. The researcher who, in a Baconian way, never ever must be abandoned to his or her wanderings, because such are inevitably exposed to the risk of being unproductive, of leaping and flying, as if they were “complacent and asocial visionaries”. To punish them, if needed, evaluation will suffice.

What then is the supersession of administrative drift, implied and supervised? The first step is the attempt to bring it to light, establishing in the meantime ways of seeing and perspectives able to make their priority its fractures and its flaws.

Thinking education, consequently perhaps means trying to reconstruct the preconditions for it becoming thinkable, inhabiting as contemporaries the pedagogical time of the anachronism.

of ‘What Works’ in Education Research, in “Journal of Philosophy of Education”, n. S1, 2008, pp. 15-39.

⁴² Cf. Th. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, cit., p. 196.